



**ASHA**  
American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

April 6, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Secretary Becerra:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, I write to ask you to renew the COVID-19 public health emergency that is scheduled to expire on April 16. ASHA maintains that this is a necessary and warranted step toward ending the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring Americans have access to critical care provided by audiologists and speech-language pathologists during the pandemic and beyond.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 223,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists (SLPs); speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students. Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids. Speech-language pathologists identify, assess, and treat speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive-communication disorders.

Despite a recent downward trend for COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations, audiologists and SLPs continue to serve populations that remain at risk, including older adults in long-term care facilities, and young children who cannot be vaccinated. Extending the public health emergency (PHE) designation will support ASHA members in providing services safely and effectively .

For example, extending the PHE declaration would ensure the continuation of numerous flexibilities and waivers, including Medicare telehealth coverage of audiology and speech-language pathology services and relaxed Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act requirements. As a result of these policy flexibilities, beneficiaries have enjoyed more comprehensive access to services provided by audiologists and SLPs through telehealth, including diagnosis and treatment for a wide range of hearing, balance, speech, language, swallowing, and cognitive disorders. Medicare beneficiaries have reported high levels of satisfaction with telehealth services as noted by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC). The impact of these flexibilities goes beyond Medicare. Many commercial insurers and school districts have extended enhanced telehealth access for the duration of the PHE, and other important supports, such as the enhanced Federal Medical Assistance Percentage funding for the state Medicaid programs, are tied to this declaration.

ASHA is pleased that Congress provided a 151-day extension of telehealth waiver authorities for audiologists and SLPs beyond expiration of the PHE through Section 302 of Division P of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (Public Law 117-103). However, if the PHE is not extended for an additional 90-day period, the administration risks prematurely ending these and other flexibilities that have kept patients safe and helped providers navigate the pandemic before Congress can determine which flexibilities should remain beyond the PHE.

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Thank you for your many efforts to help health care providers and those they serve navigate the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. ASHA urges you to renew the PHE to protect providers and patients who remain vulnerable to COVID-19 and ensure continued access to the necessary care ASHA members provide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judy Rich". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Judy Rich, EdD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL  
2022 ASHA President